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## On the Order of the Variant and Vulgate Versions of the Historia Regum Britanniae

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ON THE ORDER OF THE VARIANT AND VULGATE VERSIONS OF THE  
HISTORIA REGUM BRITANNIAE

In a paper on "Wace's Roman de Brut and the Variant Version of Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae" read at the Fourth Arthurian Congress at Rennes in 1954, and since published in Speculum, I showed that Wace, in his Roman de Brut, used both the Variant Version of Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae, published by Hammer in 1951, and the Vulgate, the text familiar to scholars in the other printed editions, including those by Faral and Gröden. As Wace completed his work in 1155, the year of Geoffrey's death, the Variant must have been available during Geoffrey's lifetime, and was certainly not the late recension which Parry, who first called attention to it in the Kastner Memorial Volume, and Hammer, its editor, considered it. Given this early date for the Variant, the question of the order of the two versions, of whether the Variant was made from the Vulgate or the Vulgate from the Variant, demanded study, for one of them is quite obviously a deliberate re-writing of the other. At the Fifth Arthurian Congress in Bangor last month, I argued from evidence provided by the use of sources in the two versions that the Variant preceded the Vulgate. I wish to present today, perforce briefly and without extensive argument, further evidence suggesting that the Variant is the earlier version, the Vulgate the revision.

In the Vulgate, Geoffrey's authorship is clearly indicated at three points, without counting the colophon. He identifies himself in the dedicatory preface, regardless of ~~to~~ whom the work is addressed, <sup>to</sup> in

the "Epistle to Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln," with which he introduces the "Prophecies of Merlin" in Book VII, and in the address to Robert of Gloucester, the consul auguste passage, with its apology for writing <sup>about</sup> of the treason of a nephew towards an uncle, at the opening of Book XI. (I have not seen Faral's Manuscript P, Bibliothèque Nationale 6233, but the information given by Griscom suggests that the absence from it of the dedicatory preface and the description of Britain is not necessarily evidence of revision, regardless of what may be true of the changes at the beginning of Book VII, <sup>where Geoffrey is not mentioned, but the reference to Alexander is retained;</sup> ~~that is,~~ the absence of the preface and the description looks accidental.) None of the Variant manuscripts, with the possible exception of the Exeter, contains these passages. It is true that the dedicatory preface is in the Exeter manuscript; but the facts are not precisely as Hammer, <sup>although he</sup> who qualified his statement by saying "as far as I can see from the photostat," gives them, and they call for examination.

If the photographer had begun his work with the preceding opening, Hammer would not have written that the Exeter manuscript "once contained the full prologue; in its present condition the manuscript begins . . . with 'paginam illinissem.'" The Variant in the Exeter manuscript follows a text of Dares Phrygius, which ends in the second column of page ninety-three, that is, on the recto of an opening. On page ninety-four, the following verso, is the dedicatory preface, beginning at the top of the first column, but without heading, "Cum mecum," etc., ending before the bottom of the second column is reached with "interno congratulatur affectu." This second column begins with "paginam illinissem," the first words appearing in Hammer's photostat. The space at the bottom of the second column is filled with a rather roughly drawn, perhaps later, genealogy of Brutus, derived from the Variant. The leaf containing the

q. Hammer,  
Speculum,  
X, 7, not. 3.

end of the Dares and the dedicatory preface of the Historia is the last leaf of a gathering. Page ninety-five, <sup>the recto of</sup> ~~on~~ the first leaf of the next gathering, is headed in red: "Here begins the History of the Britons translated from the British language into Latin by Geoffrey Arthur of Monmouth" ("Incipit Historia Britomum a galfrido arturus monemutensi de britannica lingua in latinum translata"). Following this rubric, in the normal brown ink of the manuscript, and so far as I can judge in the same hand as the Dares, comes the description of Britain, taken very nearly literatim from parts of Bede's description, and peculiar to the Variant. Considering that the dedicatory preface is not found in any other manuscript of the Variant, it seems likely that the Exeter scribe, in order to fill out a leaf, picked up the preface <sup>from</sup> ~~for~~ the manuscript he was using for the Dares and then turned to the Variant exemplar. The absence of a heading before the preface, the presence of one introducing the Variant on the next folio, further support this conjecture. Geoffrey is referred to as author in the colophon of the Variant manuscripts; but the position is exposed, and—I do not labor the point—this could be scribal addition under the influence of the more widely circulated Vulgate.

In addition to identifying the author, two of these passages peculiar to the Vulgate contain references to <sup>b</sup>Robert of Gloucester, ~~which~~ <sup>to add these</sup> there would have been reason <sup>and</sup> for a supporter of Matilda, which Geoffrey seems to have been, <sup>and</sup> for a writer desirous of Robert's patronage, as Geoffrey obviously was, ~~to add~~. One of them, the consul auguste passage with its none too covert reference to Stephen's disregard of his uncle's having settled the crown on Matilda, could hardly have been added until after Henry I's death in 1135. (I might add, incidentally, that the "Vae tibi Neustria" passage in the Prophecies, usually considered a late addition and certainly not earlier than Henry's death, is also absent from the Variant.) There is no apparent reason for removing these.

passages, once they had been put in, unless they were removed by a partisan of Stephen. Such a partisan should also have done something about the good queens, who figure as prominently in the Variant as in the Vulgate and were, I agree with Tatlock, obvious propaganda for Matilda. Certainly Geoffrey, who seems to have left the consul auguste passage in a text dedicated to both Stephen and Robert, would not have bothered to remove them. His dedication of the Vita Merlini to Alexander's successor as Bishop of Lincoln is not, I submit, necessarily evidence that Geoffrey had shifted his allegiance to Stephen, but merely that he was still in the diocese of Lincoln. . . . But certainty in such matters is impossible at this late date, and there is other evidence to be considered.

The Vulgate is more<sup>e</sup> elaborate, more highly rhetorical in style than the Variant; ~~and~~ it not infrequently has the better narrative, is worked out more consistently, with fuller and more exact detail; <sup>and</sup> and it is now and then somewhat more accurate. For example, in the Variant, Brutus and his Trojans lay Mauretania waste "from sea to sea" ("a mari usque ad mare"); in the Vulgate "from end to end" ("a fine ad finem"). This is a small change, but a happy accident, if it was accidental, for Mauretania had only one sea-coast. Somewhat similar is a change in Book IX. Kaerliudcoit is said in the Variant to be "called Lincoln in our language" ("quae Lindicolinia nostra lingua dicitur"); the Vulgate says of it "This city in the province of Lindsey, located on a mountain between two rivers, is also called Lincoln" ("Hec autem in lindiseiensi prouintia inter duo flumina super montem locata; alio nomine lindicolinum nuncupatur"). The additional detail is correct and, though it is not important in the conduct of the battle, helps to localise it. Again, in the Variant, Uther marries Anna to "Leil nomine, dux de Lodonesia"; in the Vulgate, to "loth de lodonesia."



More convincing, however, are such differences as the following.

Brutus has been asked by the Trojans, whom he found in Greece, to free them from their servitude to the Greeks. On the <sup>side</sup> of the Trojans is a most noble young man, Assaracus, son of a Greek father, who left him three castles, and a Trojan concubine. Assaracus's legitimate half-brother is trying by force to deprive him of the castles. In the Vulgate, but not in the Variant, the security provided by these castles is explicitly mentioned as one of the reasons leading Brutus to accept the offered leadership. The Vulgate writer makes better use of the previous mention of the castles, the significance of which would not have been lost on a twelfth-century audience.

<sup>by the war in Greece,</sup>  
~~In the end,~~ Brutus surprises <sup>Pandarus,</sup> the Greek king, by a stratagem that is better worked out in the Vulgate than in the Variant. In both versions, the Greeks, fleeing in battle, are rallied <sup>by</sup> ~~in~~ Antigonus, who is then captured by the Trojans. In the Vulgate, but not in the Variant, his friend Anacletus is captured with him. In the Variant, therefore, when Brutus wishes to make use of Anacletus, the writer has to pause and awkwardly explain his presence. It looks very much as if the Variant is here first draft, the Vulgate revision. Having forced Anacletus by threat of death to do his bidding, Brutus instructs him in the Variant to go to the Greek lines and tell the guards that he has freed Antigonus from Brutus's "prison and chains," but that he has left him hidden in the bushes at the edge of the forest, unable to bring him farther because of the pursuing Trojans. Surely this would serve only to put the Greeks on their guard. In the Vulgate, Brutus instructs Anacletus to tell the Greek guards that he has freed Antigonus from prison (there is ~~no~~ mention of chains), but that he has been unable to bring him farther because of the fetters which impede him. Clearly, the Vulgate is better thought out. In the Variant, Anacletus, approaching the Greek camp, is taken by the

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guards, who on hearing his story, "hesitating not at all," <sup>("Nihil hesitantes")</sup> follow him to the ambush Brutus has prepared. In the Vulgate, he is challenged by the scouts, <sup>re-iterating</sup> ~~re-iterating~~ the area; he tells his tale; while they are in doubt as to whether he is telling the truth, a man who knew him before comes up, greets him, and identifies him; only then do the Greeks, "hesitating not at all," accompany him to the ambush. Argument that the Vulgate is here the re-working seems hardly necessary; only stupidity could explain the change if made from the Vulgate to the Variant, and the Variant writer was at least not that stupid.

<sup>When it introduces</sup>  
~~In the initial description of~~ Corineus, the Vulgate describes him as a man "Who if he fought with any giant, overwhelmed him as easily as if he were contending with a boy" ("Qui si cum aliquo gigante congressum faceret. ilico obruebat eum ac si cum puero contenderet"). The Variant does not have this and so loses a most effective bit of preparation for Corineus's exploits in the battle with Gofarius in Aquitania and for the wrestling match with Goemagog to come later. Passing over the story of Lear, in which I would suggest that the Vulgate's account of his meeting with Cordeila is more effectively dramatic than the Variant's, I come to a similar example of the Vulgate's more effective preparation in the story of Brennius and Belinus. In the Vulgate, Brennius has gone to Norway for aid against his brother and has married the king's daughter. As he is going back to Britain to defend his land of Northumbria against his brother, his fleet is attacked by Guthlacus of Denmark, who, in love with the king's daughter himself and grieved beyond measure, has prepared a fleet and sailed to intercept Brennius. In the Variant, there is no mention of Guthlacus's love until after the battle in which he captures <sup>the ship carrying</sup> ~~the ship in which~~ the princess ~~is traveling~~. Again, the probable direction of change would seem to be obvious.

I would not try, as did Sir. E. K. Chambers, to find evidence for the date of the Historia or its revisions in the list of earls present at Arthur's great Pentecostal crown-wearing in Book IX; but there is no question that this list is, in the Vulgate manuscripts, confused and uncertain. The situation can rather easily, I think, be explained by reference to the Variant. In the Variant, the third earl in the list is Anaraut of Salisbury ("Anaraut ~~Slas~~beriensis"); the eighth is Galluc of Silchester ("Galluc Silcestriae"). Now there was not, and never has been, an earldom of Silchester, ~~today~~ and it would ~~seem~~ <sup>also</sup> in Geoffrey's time <sup>to have been</sup> a quite unimportant place. But as the Calleva Atrebatum of the Romans, and because of its Roman ruins, Silchester figured prominently in both versions of the Historia. Constantine was made king there, Arthur was elected king there, and it had a bishop. In the fiction of the Historia it deserved an earl, and the Variant provided one. But the offense against realism <sup>seems to have been</sup> ~~was~~ too much for the scribes of the Vulgate, if not for Geoffrey. None of the Vulgate manuscripts used by Faral and Griscom, none of those cited by Chambers, has Galluc of Silchester. They get out of the difficulty in various ways: several omit him altogether, reducing the eleven earls to ten; Bern substitutes Winchester for Silchester; Leyden substitutes Salisbury and changes the earlier Salisbury to Shrewsbury; Faral's P agrees with Leyden in making the eighth earl of Salisbury, but fails to change the third, and in the end offers two earls of Salisbury. It looks as if the Variant has here the original reading; whether the Vulgate also had it at first cannot be determined without a collation of all the manuscripts.

In the Variant's account of the Roman mission to Arthur's court and the response to it, there ~~is~~ is noise and disturbance in the court after Lucius's letter has been read, and the ambassadors are



threatened. The noise and threats are omitted in the Vulgate, preserving the dignity of Arthur's court; the Variant, however, is perhaps the more realistic. After Arthur has quieted the court, in the Variant he and his barons withdraw to take counsel, agree to refuse the Roman demand, return to court, and give their answer to the ambassadors. The letter which Arthur sends is summarized in indirect discourse. Informed of Arthur's defiance by the returned ambassadors, Lucius collects his army from the entire ~~of~~ Orient, and the Romans set out for Britain. Meanwhile, Arthur has asked those loyal to him for aid. Auguselus, in a speech in the same mood as that given him in the Vulgate, says that he will provide two thousand knights, not counting foot soldiers. Hoel of Armorica promises ten thousand, and the others follow suit. Arthur commits the kingdom to Modred and Guinevere, and sails from Southampton. Compared to the handling in the Vulgate, I submit that this is what a writer making it up as he went along might do, not what a reviser would make of the Vulgate.

In the Vulgate, there is, as I have said, no disturbance. Arthur withdraws with his council, and as they are going up the stairs, Cadur ~~make some speech~~ makes a speech, similar to that with which he opens the council in the Variant but more appropriate to place and occasion here, rejoicing that now the Britons are to be rescued from the danger of peacetime ~~efeminacy~~ <sup>effeminacy</sup>. In the council, Arthur opens the proceedings, as he should, with an address to his barons. Hoel, who is second in precedence to Arthur, replies with a speech, to which nothing in the Variant corresponds, and promises ten thousand men. Auguselus follows Hoel, promising two thousand, not counting foot soldiers. The others make their offers, Arthur tells them to collect their armies quickly, they return to the hall, and Arthur ~~sends~~ sends his defiance to Rome, *in a letter which is quoted in full.* →

Lucius collects his army and sets out to subjugate Britain. Arthur commits his kingdom to Modred and Guinevere, and sails from Southampton.

Here events are set out clearly in their proper order, a tremendous scene is more dramatically realized than in the Variant.

It is true that the Variant is shorter than the Vulgate. In Books VIII through X, for example, it has an estimated 11,700 words to the Vulgate's 19,000. Parry, in his review of Hammer's edition, implied that he considered it inferior. But the inferiority in the passages I have examined here does not seem to be of a kind that would result from abridgement, and there are other reasons that make me doubt that the Variant is an abridgement. There are too many places, for example, where it takes more space to say something than does the Vulgate, and without adding anything important. Rather, the inferiority of the Variant in comparison with the Vulgate seems to be the inferiority of a first draft compared with a revision.

There is other evidence than that <sup>which</sup> I have been able to present here leading to the same conclusion, and the list of examples I have given could be extended. The Variant may after all be "the first edition of Galfrid's history" which Lewis Jones, <sup>thought it was where</sup> who in 1753 bought the manuscript <sup>Source of</sup> ~~from which were taken~~ the excerpts contained in Panton 37, <sup>perhaps he was wrong</sup> ~~thought it was~~. It may even be that we will have to <sup>re</sup> consider Ward's suggestion (Catalogue of Romances, I, 214) "that archdeacon Walter made a rough cast of the work, which he handed over to Geoffrey to elaborate; and that the latter then applied to Gloucester for his patronage."